

County soil marks Wilson's Belgium grave

MARGARET HAYLOCK CAPON
For County Weekly News

Soil from the Prince Edward County farm where he spent his youth has been sprinkled at the grave of World War I soldier, Thomas Clifford Wilson, at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium.

Michael Korn, present owner of the Wilson farm and producer of "Till the Boys Come Home, a 100th anniversary choral tribute in memory of Canadians who served in the Great War (1914-1918), carried the earth with him on the choir's recent European tour. He spread it at Wilson's final resting place as a gesture of remembrance from home.

"For many people of my generation, born in the 1950's and 1960's, the Great War is an historical event experienced only through the pages and images of books. Growing up, few of us understood the long shadows that this war to end all wars cast, and continues to cast, down through the generations," he says.

"Fortunately, very few of my generation have experienced war. My German parents were not so lucky. My mother experienced the terrible bombing of Cologne, where hardly anything but the beautiful Gothic Cathedral was left standing and my father was a Holocaust survivor.

My Jewish grandfather found refuge in the United Kingdom before the Second World War started and served in the British Army for eight years."

Born in England, Korn came to Canada in 1975 and, in 1994, bought the former Wilson farm just north of Wellington. "I did not realize that even in this bucolic setting I would not be able to escape from war's long shadow," he observes.

"On an ordinary day back in 1917, the owners of the farm received a fateful telegram telling them their son, Thomas Clifford Wilson, aged 23, had died on Nov. 4 at the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium - a young life so full of potential

snuffed out in an instant."

Wilson was born in 1894, at Irvine Gore (now Wilson Road) in Hallowell Township. His father and grandfather were farmers and respected members of the Anglican Church. Wilson was baptized in St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Wellington on Dominion Day, 1894. Ironically, his sister, Nellie, was singing a solo, "O Grant Us Peace, O Lord", at the church on the night he died.

Prior to the war, the young soldier had been employed by the Bank of Nova Scotia in Wellington and, later, the Metropolitan Bank in Picton. When war broke out he enlisted with the 254th Battalion and left

a promising future behind.

"Till the Boys Come Home", featuring a Canadian choir, the North Lakeshore Chorus, with singers from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario was presented in Europe from June 27 to July 11. Musical director was Ian Juby, chorus master of the Kingston Choral Society. Pianists were Jacqueline Mokrzewski and Charles Willett and piper, Garret Rodgers.

Korn says this year marks the 100th anniversary of the landing of the First Contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, in France, after training in England. Many would never see their homes again.



ALAN R. CAPON COLLECTION

Thomas Clifford Wilson who died in 1917, in the Battle of Passchendaele and was buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium.